

CENTRAL AMERICA RATHER: Good evening. This is the CBS Evening News, Dan Rather reporting tonight from CBS News election headquarters in New York. While Democratic candidates slugged it out today in the Pennsylvania primary, President Reagan and those in Congress concerned about his Central America policy slugged it out on Pennsylvania Avenue. Mr. Reagan struggled to salvage his policy, following disclosure that the CIA is directly involved in the mining of Nicaraguan harbors. Our coverage begins with Lesley Stahl.

STAHL: The Reagan administration charged today that Cuba is arming and training guerrillas for a major offensive this fall against El Salvador. The charge was part of the administration's own offensive, aimed at salvaging its military aid and covert operations in Central America, which are facing bitter opposition in Congress. At a welcoming ceremony for the president of the Dominican Republic, Mr. Reagan lashed out at Cuba. REAGAN: Instead of seeking mutual respect and friendly commerce with its neighbors, it exports violence and hatred. Cuba is now dependent on a far away, totalitarian power without whose subsidy its dictatorial government could not export aggression, or indeed survive.

STAHL: The administration is fighting for its \$21 million request in Congress to continue covert guerrilla operations against Nicaragua, including the mining of its harbors. Administration officials are warning they'll have to start shutting down the whole covert operation as early as next week unless Congress acts quickly. Despite that, President Reagan will not make a personal appeal for the covert aid, no lobbying or phone-calling because his adviser says, 'We've probably lost this one already.' Central America is turning into a potentially damaging issue for the president's campaign, as there were questions in Congress today not only about the wisdom of the policy but about whether Mr. Reagan himself is making the decisions. JAMES BAKER (White House Chief of Staff): The, the president is the decision-maker in this administration. The president makes these decisions.

STAHL: The White House engaged in some damage control late this afternoon by putting out this three-page statement denying that there are any plans at all for the U.S. to use combat troops in Central America and urging Congress to pass its request for aid to El Salvador. Lesley Stahl, CBS News, the White House.

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PHIL JONES: Here on Capitol Hill, the political mines were exploding even before CIA Director William Casey arrived on a mission to salvage Reagan policies. Casey had received this blistering letter from Intelligence Committee Chairman Goldwater. Goldwater, who claimed he was not briefed on the mining, called it an act of war, saying, 'This is no way to run a railroad. And in the future, if anything like this happens, I'm going to raise one hell of a lot of fuss about it in the public.' The Senate chamber was quiet most of today as senators were in closed briefings with Casey, briefings that were described as confrontational and electric. But according to all accounts, few minds were changed. And a sense of the Senate measure by Senator Kennedy deploring the mining and withdrawal from World Court jurisdiction picked up support. This entire episode has embarrassed most Senate Republicans who claim they had no idea of what was going on and had they know they would not have supported the administration as much as they did in last week's battles over Central American funding. And the controversy has clearly damaged the administration's credibility and could well affect the outcome of requests for Central American funds that are now before the House. Phil Jones, CBS News, Capitol Hill.

RATHER: The Soviet Union said today it would consider a request from Nicaragua to clear its harbors of mines. France also has made such an offer.